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Central European Section

THE FATE OF FREE MASONRY IN EUROPE SINCE THE WORLD WAR

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4 of 5

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INTEROFFICE MEMO

FROM: William L. Langer **DATE** February 28,1942

TO: Colonel Donovan

SUBJECT: Central European Section

THE FATE OF FREE MASONRY IN EUROPE SINCE THE WORLD WAR

I am sending you a report prepared by our Central European Section on the FATE OF FREE MASONRY IN EUROPE SINCE THE WORLD WAR. This was prepared at the request of Mr. Liam O'Connor of the Office of Facts and Figures and the ribbon copy of the report has gone forward to him.

William L. Langer

William L. Langer
Director of Research

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THE FATE OF FREE MASONRY IN EUROPE SINCE THE WORLD WAR

I. The fascist powers have placed Free Masonry in the same list of enemies with the Jews and the liberals. They have fought it ruthlessly with the open purpose of destroying it forever. On the surface at least they have succeeded in their endeavor.

The prohibition and persecution of Free Masonry has kept pace with the expansion of totalitarianism. Beginning with Mussolini in Italy, the list of authoritarian opponents to Free Masonry has come to include the governments of Hitler, Franco, Petain, and of all the countries under Axis control.

II. Irrespective of national origin the stock arguments used by the fascist powers against Free Masonry scarcely vary. The Nazi version may be summarized as follows:

The Nazis accused the Free Masons of the most heinous crime within the Nazi repertory, that of placing the interests and needs of their masonic brothers higher than those of the German nation. The Nazi press supplied the public with a stream of articles condemning them and their alleged allies. Stresemann's foreign policy was attributed to them; all of Germany's troubles were blamed upon them. All the troubles of the world were laid at their door. The Free Masons were accused of wishing to disrupt Germany and every other nation, of plotting the overthrow of governments, especially of any strong German government. They were blamed for the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the outbreak of the World War, the Treaty of Versailles, the outbreak of the present war, in short for every act of the century which the Nazis hate. (See, among others, Völkischer Beobachter, September 10, 1930, Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, September 3, 1939, Ludendorff's writings, and the notorious books by Alfred Rosenberg and Friedrich Wichtl.)

General Ludendorff declared that Free Masonry was "a Jewish device intended to make Jews out of everybody." Free Masonry was, he said, an "auxiliary troop" of the Jews. He spoke of Free Masons as "artificial Jews."

Hitler in Mein Kampf spoke of the Free Masons as follows:

"The general pacifistic paralysation of the National instinct of self-preservation, introduced into the circles of the so-called 'intelligentsia' by Free-masonry, is transmitted to the great masses, but above all to the bourgeoisie, by the activity of the great press, which today is always Jewish." (Mein Kampf, Reynal and Hitchcock edition, p. 442-443)

"For the strengthening of his political position he [the Jew] tries to pull down the racial and civil barriers which at first still restrain him at every step. For this purpose he fights with all his innate thoroughness for religious tolerance--and in the completely

deteriorated Freemasonry he has an excellent instrument for fighting out and also for 'putting over' his aims. By the strings of Freemasonry the circles of the government and the higher layers of the political and economic bourgeoisie fall into his nets without their even guessing this!" (Ibid., p. 433.)

"While the international world Jew slowly but surely strangles our throats, our so-called patriots shout against the man and a system who have dared to free themselves at least in one spot on this earth from the Jewish-Masonic grip and to put up a nationalistic resistance against this international world poisoning." (Ibid., p. 699-700.)

"The struggles which Fascist Italy is carrying on, perhaps at bottom unconsciously (although personally I do not think this is the case), against the three main weapons of Jewry is the best omen that, if only indirectly, the fangs will be torn out of this super-State power. The prohibition of Masonic secret societies, the persecution of the super-national press as well as the continuous undermining of international Marxism, and, on the other hand, the steady fortifying of the Fascist State conception, will, in the course of years, enable the Fascist government to serve the interests of the Italian nation increasingly, without concern for the hissing of the Jewish world hydra." (Ibid., p. 927-928.)

III. According to Meyer's Lexikon (1938) there were (1933) in Germany 75,328 members in 731 Masonic lodges, in Austria 1,034 in 24 lodges, in Czechoslovakia 2000 in 33 lodges.

IV. Free Masonry in Nazi Germany.

The Nazi government issued a law on July 15, 1933, in accordance with which it could destroy Free Masonry. This law read as follows:

"The provisions of the law of May 26, 1933 concerning the confiscation of communist property are to be applied to the property and rights of the Ger an social democratic party and its auxiliary and collateral organizations as well as to property and rights which are used or are intended to further Marxist or other movements which, according to determination by the minister of the interior, are hostile to the people and the State." (Quoted and translated in James K. Pollock and Harlow J. Heneman, The Hitler Decrees, Ann Arbor, 1934, pp. 35-36.)

The only other official statement available for this report is contained in a decision of the Reichs Finanzhof (Supreme Tax-Court) on June 24, 1936, which stated that the National Socialist state opposes Free Masonry as being "contrary to the principles of the German people" and therefore does not tolerate its existence. (Reichssteuerblatt, p. 796.)

V. The powerful business connections of German Free Masonry held off the Nazi onslaught after 1933 for only a short time.

The chronological story of the Nazi persecution of the Free Masons is as follows:

(1) The Arbeiterzeitung of Vienna on April 20, 26, 31, 1933, reported mass arrests of persons throughout Germany merely because they were thought to be Masons. The arrested persons were held without trial and were reported as being thrown into concentration camps.

(2) The Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, May 26, 1933, reported that the Nazi Party Direction had ordered that no Free Masons were to be admitted to membership in the party and that former Masons could not hold office in the party.

(3) The Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, December 3, 1933, reported that Walther Darre had declared the Masons to be the enemies of German peasantry because a peasant cannot be other than nationalistic.

(4) On January 16, 1934, Minister Goering informed the three Old Prussian Lodges that they could not transform themselves into a "National Christian Order of Frederick the Great." He refused to discuss the problem as to whether they are as dangerous to the State as the other lodges which are part of world masonry, and declared that "there is no further justification for the existence of Masonic lodges." (Völkischer Beobachter, January 17, 1934, New York Times, April 20, 1933, Friedrich Wichtl, Weltfreimaurerei, Weltrevolution, Weltrepublik, 12th ed., p. 8.)

(5) The Manchester Guardian, May 31, 1934, reported that General von Blomberg, Minister of Defense, had forbidden "any officer, man or employee of the Reichswehr to belong to any masonic organization whatsoever."

(6) The New York Times, August 25, 1934, reported that the Nazi party had barred all former Masons from its ranks.

(7) The Voelkischer Beobachter reported December 24, 1934, that Minister Goering had ordered the dissolution of a large number of Masonic lodges in Prussia: Friedrich Wilhelm zum goldenen Zepter, Minerva zu den drei Richtern, Karl zur Treue, Zum Licht im Wald, Teutonia zur Weisheit, Zur Morgenröte, Wilhelm zur ostpreussischen Treue, Astrea, Wahrheit und Einigkeit zu den sieben vereinigten Brüdern, Hedwig zum Licht.

(8) The New York Times, March 18, 1935, reported mass arrests of Masons in Germany.

(9) In the summer of 1935, the three Old Prussian Grand Lodges, noted for their conservatism, issued a statement that in view of "the unbridgeable divergencies between the masonic spirit and the ideals of National Socialism there is no place for lodges in the Third Reich."

The lodges which had escaped the ban in December, 1934, now dissolved themselves, to take effect July 21, 1935. Because of their high connections they were allowed to liquidate their property and in September, 1936, were still in the process of doing so. After Minister Goebbels had attacked Masonry as "Jewish", "international", and conspiratory, the few other surviving lodges in Saxony declared their "voluntary" termination effective August 10. (New York Times, August 6, 9, 10, 1935, London Times, August 10, 1935, Wichtl, p. 8.)

(10) On August 17, 1935, Minister Frick proudly reported the complete dissolution of Masonic lodges and the confiscation of their property. (New York Times, August 18, 1935.)

(11) On November 9, 1935, eight allegedly Jewish Masonic lodges were reported dissolved and their property seized. (N.Y. Times, Nov. 9, 1935)

(12) The Frankfurter Zeitung, September 9, 1936, stated that by order of the Reich cabinet all civil servants who were Masons on or after January 30, 1933 (when Hitler became chancellor) would be dismissed.

(13) In 1937, an Anti-Masonic Exposition was held in Munich under the auspices of Minister Goebbels. Much of the loot obtained from Masonic libraries and other collections was exhibited. (The American Mercury, February, 1941, p. 186.)

VI. The Persecution of Free Masonry in Fascist Italy.

Although Free Masonry had played a leading part in the unification of Italy, Mussolini began step by step to eliminate it from Italian life as soon as he came to power. In 1924 he decreed that a member of the Fascist party could not be a Free Mason. In case he was both, he must choose between them. Thereupon General Cappello, one of the most prominent Fascists, and at the same time the Deputy Grand Master of Grande Oriente, the leading Italian Grand Lodge, resigned from the Fascist party. Within a year he was accused of plotting against Mussolini's life, and although the accusation was undoubtedly a frame-up, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison. The sentence was executed immediately and the General probably still remains in prison.

In the summer of 1925, Mussolini ordered the dissolution of Italian Free Masonry. The Grand Master of the Grande Oriente, Domizio Torrigiani, published an open letter to Mussolini condemning the act in the name of freedom and democracy. He was exiled to Lipari Islands for his defiance, and after nearly going blind there, he soon afterwards died. Hundreds of other prominent Masons were likewise exiled to the same islands.

During the anti-Masonic violence of 1925-1927, the Blackshirts looted the homes of prominent Masons in Milan, Florence and other

cities, and murdered more than 100 members. During the same time Masonic temples were raided and the property seized. (On the Fascist persecution of Free Masonry, see New York Times, October 18, 1925, March 20, 1926, and especially Sven G. Lunden, "The Annihilation of Freemasonry," The American Mercury, February, 1941.)

VII. The Persecution of Free Masonry in the Rest of Europe. (On this section, see in general the article of Lunden in The American Mercury, February, 1941.)

The intimate relation between the destruction of Free Masonry and the spread of dictatorial government is revealed in the following details:

(1) In 1917 the Bolsheviks dissolved all lodges in Russia.

(2) In 1919, Bela Kun in Hungary ordered the dissolution of all lodges, and the subsequent reactionary government retained the prohibition.

(3) In 1925, Spain's first dictator, General Primo de Rivera, ordered the abolition of Free Masonry in that country, but the suppression and dissolution had to be repeated in 1940. (New York Times, February 25, March 3, 1940.) General Franco sentenced all Free Masons to 10 years in prison.

(4) As soon as the German troops invaded Austria, the Nazis raided Masonic temples, confiscated all the property, and seized and imprisoned without charge as many Masons or persons accused of being Masons as they could find. Many members were shipped to the concentration camp at Dachau in Bavaria. The German regulations concerning Free Masonry were automatically applied to Austria. (See Gedye, Betrayal in Central Europe, p. 323, New York Times, March 17, April 5, 1938.) The work was efficiently carried out by the Gestapo.

(5) After the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Nazis repeated the process in Bohemia, and made certain that the Slovak puppet government (October, 1938) did the same. (New York Times, October 28, 1938.)

(6) The Polish government at the time of the first partition of Czechoslovakia had already dissolved the Masonic orders. (New York Times, November 25, 1938.) After the Nazi conquest of Poland, the work was thoroughly carried out by the Gestapo.

(7) The pro-German government in Jugoslavia did the same in August, 1940. (New York Times, August 9, 1940.)

(8) The same was true for Rumania (New York Times, September 9, 10, 1940.)

(9) and for Bulgaria.

(10) After the occupation of Belgium, the Netherlands, and the other countries, the Germans pursued the same policy. Everywhere Free Masonry had to be abolished.

(11) The Vichy Government immediately aligned itself with the dictatorial powers by dissolving the Grand Orient and the Grande Loge, seizing their property and selling it at auction.

VIII. The conclusion is evident. Free Masonry can survive only in a democratic country of freedom. Dictatorship, fascism, national socialism, communism demand totalitarian obedience, the destruction of all free organizations and institutions, and among them Free Masonry. The outcome of the present war will decide the fate of Free Masonry as completely as it will that of American democracy.